

THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS.



HOTEL SCHWARZER BOCK

Wiesbaden/Rhine, (GERMANY)

320 Beds - 200 Baths
Thermal Bath House - every comfort
Please ask for folder IL.

Teleprint: 0416640

Telephone: 5821 (20 Lines)

AVIA

SWISS LEVER WATCHES



BY APPOINTMENT
PURVEYORS OF CHAMPAGNE
TO THE LATE KING GEORGE VI

LOUIS ROEDERER

*A*pollinaris is the natural
mixer with Scotch...
ask for a Scotch and POLLY

The essence of feminine elegance . . .



LES PARFUMS
WORTH

JE REVIENS • VERS TOI • DANS LA NUIT • IMPRUDENCE



What a superb whiskey!

Not a drop is sold till it's seven years old

John Jameson

★ ★ ★

Drambuie

THE LIQUEUR YOU PREFER TO BE OFFERED



'GOLFERS' TROUSERS

styled by

Henry Cotton

THE HENRY COTTON (SPORTSWEAR) COMPANY
SIMON HOUSE, 15, GOLDEN SQUARE, LONDON, W.1. TEL: GERRARD 0059

Demonstrate an immaculate approach.

● EVERYONE ENJOYS GIN & LILLET - LE MEILLEUR APERITIF DE LA FRANCE ●

● EVERYONE ENJOYS



● APERITIF DE LA FRANCE ●

● GIN & LILLET - LE MEILLEUR APERITIF DE LA FRANCE ●

ALL CLASSES OF INSURANCE TRANSACTED

UNITED BRITISH INSURANCE COMPANY Ltd.

BYRON HOUSE, 7/9, ST. JAMES'S STREET, LONDON, S.W.1

THE WORLD OF SCIENCE.

A STORY has been recently released to the Press concerning an unidentified animal, seen at sea last September, sufficiently large and unusual to be included under the omnibus title of "Seamonsster." It was seen by Tex Geddes, a seafaring man with a wide knowledge of the larger marine animals, and James Gavin, an engineering inspector working in London, two men of widely-differing experience and outlook, whom chance had thrown together in the same boat for a day's mackerel fishing.

In September last I received Mr. Geddes' account. He began by telling how he set out for some mackerel fishing and that as soon as he was under way "he noticed Mr. Gavin, a holidaymaker and a keen fisherman" sitting on the rocks, and altered course to ask him if he would like to join him, which Mr. Gavin did. Then follows a description of the basking shark they saw, and a group of killer whales. Then was noticed:

... a large black shape on the surface of the water away over towards the Skye shore, probably two miles from where we were fishing. Although the object seemed to be in the general direction of where we had last seen the Killers I did not think it was one of them for neither its shape nor its behaviour seemed right. It was too high out of the water in the first place and it remained on the surface for several minutes at a time. When the object appeared to be steaming towards us we both stood up for a better view. I can't remember exactly how close it was when I heard the breathing, but I certainly could hear it before I could definitely have said that the object was alive. It was not making much speed, maybe 3 or 4 knots. We were soon able to make out two distinct objects, one larger than the other, and began making guesses as to what it might be. I am afraid we both stared in amazement as the object came towards us, for this beast steaming slowly in our direction was like some hellish monster of prehistoric times.

The head was definitely reptilian, about two feet six high with large protruding eyes. There were no visible nasal organs, but a large red gash of a mouth which seemed to cut the head in half and which appeared to have distinct lips. There was at least two feet of clear water behind the neck, less than a foot of which we could see, and the creature's back which rose sharply to its highest point some three to four feet out of the water and fell away gradually towards the after end. I would say we saw 8 to 10 ft. of back on the water line. Petrified, we stood and watched it as it came closer and closer... it was soon parallel with the dinghy, at a distance of 20 yards... it was constantly turning its head from side to side, as if surveying all around it... in profile the head appeared rather blunt and much darker than the rest of the body [which] seemed to be scaly and the top of its back was surmounted by an immense saw-toothed ridge... it seemed to breathe through its mouth which opened and shut with great regularity, and once when it turned towards us, I could see into its cavernous red maw... I saw no teeth... there was surprisingly little disturbance in the water as it passed, even when it submerged, as it did from time to time. Submerging was quite a graceful movement; it arched its neck and leisurely put its head under the surface, the head completely disappearing before there was any appreciable movement from the body, which slid below the surface like a seal... Within seconds the head would break surface again and come clean out of the water before the body reappeared. During one of its dives we clearly saw a large darker piece sticking up well aft, whether this was some sort of fin, whether a flipper or a foot, your guess is as good as mine. It was only when it was swimming away from us that we were able to see that the creature's body, although 4 to 5 ft. broad at the water line, rose sharply to almost a knife-edge at the top of the back... We watched it for well over an hour...

I had forwarded to Mr. James Gavin a letter asking for his version, and on November 24 came the reply:

Please forgive my delay in replying... Herewith, as briefly as possible, my description of the beast.

THE SOAY BEAST.

By MAURICE BURTON, D.Sc.

At the waterline the body was 6 to 8 ft. long. It was hump-shaped rising to a centrally-placed apex about two feet high. The line of the back was formed by a series of triangular-shaped spines, the largest at the apex and reducing in size to the waterline. The spines appeared to be solid and immobile—they did not resemble fins. I only got a lateral view of the animal but my impression was that the cross section of the body was roughly angular in shape. Apart from the forward glide I saw no movement.

The neck appeared to be cylindrical and, at a guess, about 8 ins. in diameter. It arose from the water about 12 ins. forward of the body. I could not see where they joined; about 15 to 18 ins. of neck was visible. The head was rather like that of a tortoise with a snake-like flattened cranium running forward to a rounded face. Relatively it was as big as the head of a donkey. I saw one laterally placed eye, large and

these two descriptions do not constitute primary scientific evidence. Their value lies in that they suggest, but no more, the possible existence of some large hitherto unidentified animal.

In all that follows I am taking it for granted that the accounts given by Geddes and Gavin are objective and truthful. Having been informed on this more or less from the beginning I have been able to make such enquiries and tests that leave little room for doubt on this. It remains therefore to seek some tentative explanation of what this animal may have been.

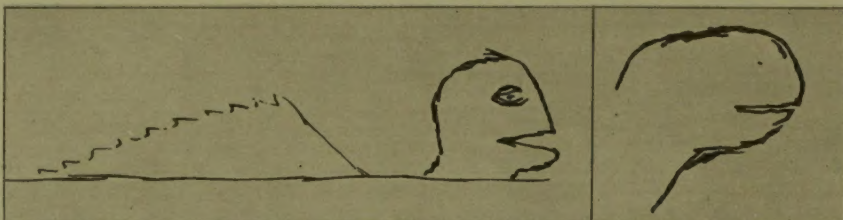
My first thought was that it may have been an unusually large leathery turtle. This occasionally visits the waters of the British Isles in summer and its back lacks the bony shell of other marine turtles. Moreover, its back is marked with seven longitudinal ridges, each slightly serrated, although the one down the mid-line of the back is no more serrated than the others. The greatest authentic measurements for the leathery turtle are 7½ ft. overall, but there are unconfirmed reports of up to 10 ft.

Taking the descriptions by Geddes and Gavin at their face-value there are several arguments against the animal they saw being a leathery turtle. First, the scales in the crest are more marked; but more important still the leathery turtle shows no neck of the kind they describe. Its neck is thick and fleshy and merges into stout shoulders to a greater extent even than in the other four species of marine turtle, the hawksbill, green, ridley and loggerhead. Even they, as can be seen from watching them in aquaria, could hardly give the appearance of a neck such as is described by Geddes and Gavin. Indeed, the description of the neck is one of the points on which they show the least disagreement.

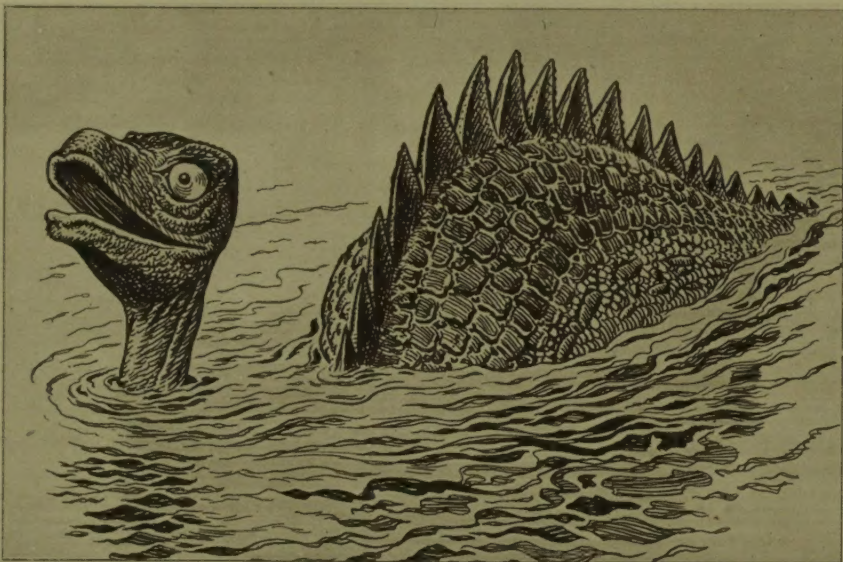
There have been, during the last 150 years, three separate accounts of unusual animals seen in much the same waters off the west coast of Scotland, and these seem to have borne some resemblance to the one under discussion. In addition, there are scattered reports from other parts of the world—and I have others (unpublished) in my correspondence files—suggestive of large turtle-like animals seen at sea. There is also the famous sighting from H.M. Yacht *Osborne* which seems to have been turtle-like with a line of serrations along the back. Taken together these do no more than suggest the existence of some large turtle-like animal so far unidentified.

A serrated crest is not uncommon among reptiles. Some terrapins (freshwater turtles) have a mid-dorsal line of serrations and if magnified to 10 ft. or more length would look very like the drawing made by Geddes. The leathery turtle belongs to a family (*Dermochelidae*) separate from that of the other three marine turtles (*Cheloniidae*) and is regarded by some zoologists as an aberrant offshoot of some ancestral sea-turtle. The Geddes-Gavin "monster" may be another, or it may be some entirely different reptile.

It may be argued that if such things exist we ought to have seen one or more stranded on the shore, as happens often enough with the leathery turtle, hawksbill, ridley, green and loggerhead. In this context the following is apposite. The common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) is so numerous that there have been occasions when some ten thousand have been seen at one time at the surface, but another dolphin (*Sotalia teuszii*) is known from one specimen only. There may be other dolphins yet to be discovered, and there may be other turtles or turtle-like reptiles, or even other marine reptiles, that may one day coelacanthise the world of science.



(Left.) A COPY OF A DRAWING MADE BY MR. TEX GEDDES, AN EX-HARPOON GUNNER, IMMEDIATELY AFTER SIGHTING WHAT HE BELIEVES TO BE AN UNIDENTIFIED ANIMAL SEEN OFF SOAY LAST SEPTEMBER. (Right.) A COPY OF A DRAWING MADE IN NOVEMBER OF THE SAME CREATURE BY MR. JAMES GAVIN, A CHIEF ENGINEERING INSPECTOR WHO WAS WITH MR. GEDDES AT THE TIME.



AN ARTIST'S DRAWING BASED SOLELY ON THE WRITTEN DESCRIPTION SUBMITTED BY MR. TEX GEDDES. MR. GAVIN HAS SAID THAT ALTHOUGH THE BODY IS A FAIR REPRESENTATION, THE HEAD SHOULD BE MORE TORTOISE-LIKE AND HE CANNOT BE CERTAIN ABOUT THE SCALES. MR. GEDDES' AUTOBIOGRAPHY, "HEBRIDEAN SHARKER," HAS RECENTLY BEEN PUBLISHED BY HERBERT JENKINS, (21s.).

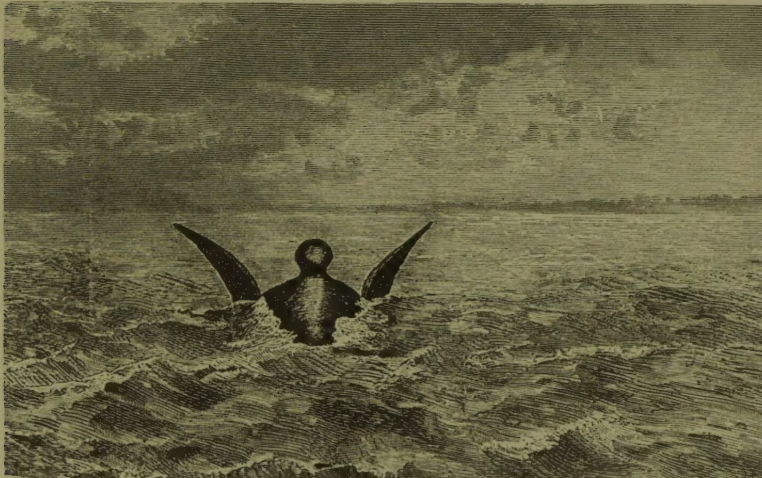
round like that of a cow. When the mouth was opened I got the impression of large blubbery lips and could see a number of tendril-like growths hanging from the palate. Head and neck arose to a height of about two feet. At intervals the head and neck went forward and submerged. They would then re-emerge, the large gaping mouth would open (giving the impression of a large melon with a quarter removed) and there would be a series of very loud roaring whistling noises as it breathed. After about five minutes the beast submerged with a forward diving motion—I thought I saw something follow the body down. It later re-surfaced about a quarter of a mile further out to sea and I then watched it until it disappeared in the distance. (I have heard that the crews of two lobster boats, fishing north of Mallaig, have also seen this animal—much to their consternation.)

There are certain obvious remarks that can be made after a brief examination of these two reports. The first is that the descriptions given are more detailed than most, if not all, accounts of strange animals seen at sea. To that extent they merit being put on record and deserve closer attention. The second is that there is an overall agreement between them. They differ in detail, but not more than is to be expected. Two people writing independent accounts of a static object would show a similar disagreement in detail, and this is bound to be accentuated for a moving object that submerges and reappears. The third comment is that

POSSIBLE CLUES TO THE SOAY BEAST FROM TO-DAY AND YESTERDAY.



SIGHTED FROM H.M. YACHT *OSBORNE* IN THE MEDITERRANEAN IN 1877: AN UNKNOWN MARINE ANIMAL SEEN FROM THE SIDE, SHOWING A RIDGE OF SCALES LIKE THAT REPORTED ON THE SOAY ANIMAL. THIS IS A CONTEMPORARY DRAWING.

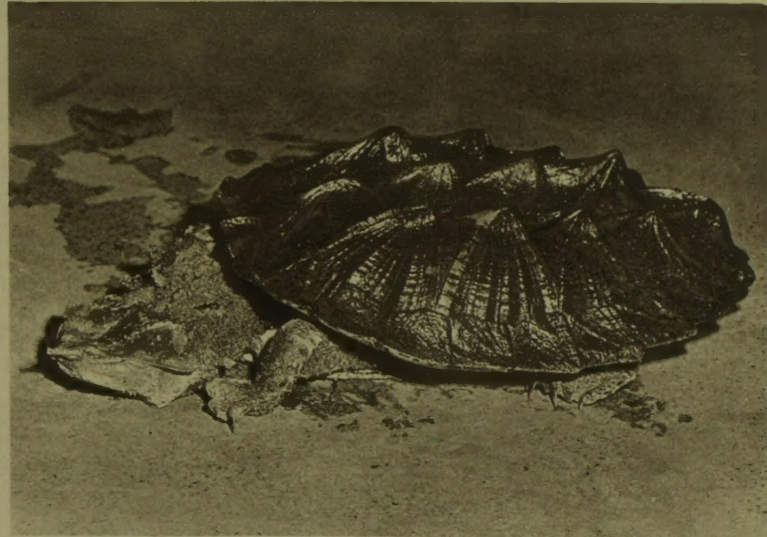


A VIEW FROM BEHIND OF THE SAME CREATURE SHOWN ABOVE, AS SIGHTED FROM H.M. YACHT *OSBORNE*. THE RAISED FLIPPERS ARE AN INTERESTING FEATURE.



AN AUSTRALIAN SIDE-NECKED TERRAPIN WITH NECK FULLY EXTENDED. THE SOAY BEAST WAS DESCRIBED AS HAVING A LONG FLEXIBLE NECK. (Photograph by Jane Burton, by courtesy of the Paignton Zoo.)

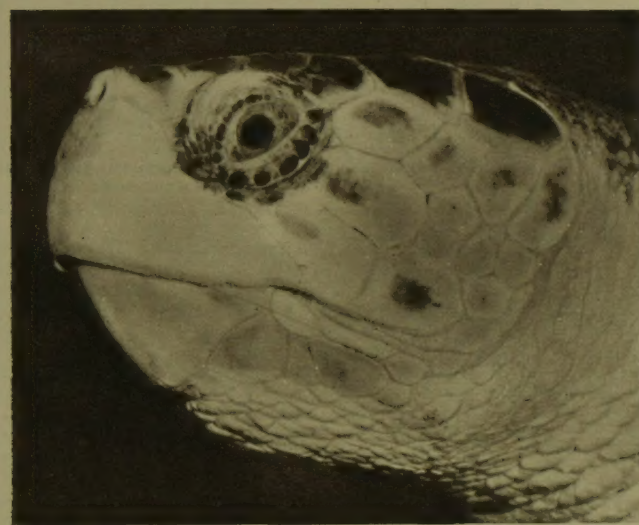
Reports of strange animals seen at sea are apt, at worst, to be ridiculed; at best, to be treated lightly. This is largely due to the small amount of detailed observation accompanying them. In the instance reported on the facing page much fuller details than usual are available, supplied by two witnesses who were unknown to each other until they joined company to go fishing, and who normally live hundreds of miles apart. Interviewed separately both have emphasised the following features: the vivid red of the inside of the mouth, the blubbery lips on the tortoise-like head, the loud "roaring whistle," the mid-dorsal serrations and the appearance of the skin which looked scaly yet seemed not to bear scales. Except to a person who had studied reptiles closely such a combination of characters would appear incongruous. Moreover, none of these characters has so far been recorded in a marine reptile. Crocodiles,



WITH CONICAL SCALES ON ITS BACK, BUT UNLIKE THOSE OF THE SOAY "MONSTER": A MATA-MATA TERRAPIN OF S. AMERICA. (Photograph by the Zoological Society of London.)



THE HEAD AND FLIPPERS OF A LOGGERHEAD TURTLE SWIMMING UNDER WATER, SHOWING A RESEMBLANCE TO THE *OSBORNE* DRAWING. (Photograph by Jane Burton.)



THE HEAD OF THE LOGGERHEAD TURTLE, STRONGLY RESEMBLING MR. GAVIN'S DESCRIPTION OF THE SOAY BEAST. THE WRINKLED SKIN COULD SIMULATE SCALES. ITS MOUTH WAS RED INSIDE, AS WITH TERRAPINS. (Photograph by Jane Burton.)

terrapins and pond-tortoises when alarmed expel air rapidly through the mouth, and even in a small individual the noise is appreciable. Yet only those who are familiar with such beasts could be aware of this. Neither of the witnesses is a zoologist, and only one (Tex Geddes) has first-hand knowledge of marine animals, as recounted in his recent book ("Hebridean Shark," Herbert Jenkins, 21s.). The second witness, James Gavin, stated in the course of an interview that, having seen a basking shark and killer whales on the morning in question, he merely supposed this third beast was yet another normal sea-beast until his more experienced companion indicated otherwise. It is not possible to identify positively the Soay beast, but the way the details given in the eye-witness accounts hang together must be due either to a most remarkable coincidence or to the fact that the beast was real.